Pope Leo hosts Hollywood stars, laments decline in movie-going

VATICAN CITY: Pope Leo told a group of leading Hollywood actors and filmmakers on Saturday that cinemas were struggling to survive and that more should be done to protect them and preserve the shared experience of watching movies.

Screen stars Cate Blanchett, Monica Bellucci, Chris Pine, and Viggo Mortensen were among those invited to the private Vatican audience, along with award-winning directors Spike Lee, Gus Van Sant, and Sally Potter.

Leo, the first US pope, said cinema was a vital "workshop of hope" at a time of global uncertainty and digital overload.

"Cinemas are experiencing a troubling decline, with many being removed from cities and neighbourhoods," he added.

"More than a few people are saying that the art of cinema and the cinematic experience are in danger. I urge institutions not to give up, but to cooperate in affirming the social and cultural value of this activity." Box office revenues in many countries remain well below the levels recorded before the Covid-19 pandemic, with multiplexes in the United States and Canada just suffering their worst summer since 1981, excluding the Covid shutdown.

Leo said cinema, which marks its 130th anniversary this year, had grown from a play of light and shadow into a form capable of revealing humanity's deepest questions. "Cinema is not just moving pictures; it sets hope in motion," he said, adding that entering a theatre was "like crossing a threshold" where the imagination widens and even pain can find new meaning.—Reuters

POPE Leo walks for an audience with filmmakers and actors at the Vatican.—Reuters

US jury orders Apple to pay firm $634 million in patent case

WASHINGTON: A federal jury in California said on Friday that Apple owes medical-monitoring technology company Masimo $634 million for infringing a patent covering blood-oxygen reading technology.

The jury agreed with Masimo that the Apple Watch's workout mode and heart rate notification features violated Masimo's patent rights, a Masimo spokesperson confirmed.

An Apple spokesperson said that the company disagrees with the verdict and will appeal.

"Over the past six years, Masimo has sued Apple in multiple courts and asserted over 25 patents, the majority of which have been found to be invalid," the spokesperson said. "The single patent in this case expired in 2022, and is specific to historic patient monitoring technology from decades ago."

Masimo, in a statement, called the verdict "a significant win in our ongoing efforts to protect our innovations and intellectual property." The California lawsuit is one branch of a contentious, multi-front patent fight between Apple and Irvine, California-based Masimo, which has accused Apple of hiring away its employees and stealing its pulse oximetry technology to use in Apple Watches.

The dispute led a U.S. trade tribunal to block imports of Apple's Series 9 and Ultra 2 smartwatches in 2023 after finding that Apple's technology infringed Masimo's patents.

Apple removed blood-oxygen reading technology from its watches to avoid the ban and reintroduced an updated version of the technology in August with approval from U.S. Customs and Border Protection.—Reuters

Iran's judiciary calls for tougher stance on hijab

TEHRAN: Iran's judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei has called for stricter methods to tackle "social anomalies", pointing in particular to more relaxed attitudes towards wearing the mandatory hijab.

Under rules imposed after the 1979 revolution, all women in Iran must cover their hair in public with a hijab, or headscarf, and wear modest, loose-fitting clothing.

But in major cities, particularly Tehran, many women now walk around without the head coverings, often sporting jeans and sneakers, which has become a point of contention for conservatives.

"I have ordered the prosecutor general and all prosecutors in the country to ask the security and law enforcement agencies to identify organised and foreign-related movements in the field of social anomalies and introduce them to the judiciary," Ejei was quoted as saying by the newspaper *Etemad* on Friday.

"One manifestation of the enemy's efforts lies in the issue of nudity and not observing hijab." The term "nudity" generally refers to clothing deemed inappropriate.

This phenomenon of forgoing the hijab has become more visible in Iran since the protests that followed the death in custody of Mahsa Amini in Sept 2022.—AFP

Trump hints at suing BBC for $5bn over edited speech

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said on Friday he would likely sue the *BBC* next week for as much as $5 billion after the British broadcaster admitted it wrongly edited a video of a speech he gave, but insisted there was no legal basis for his claim.

The *British Broadcasting Corporation* has been plunged into its biggest crisis in decades after two senior leaders resigned following accusations of bias, including over the editing of Trump's speech on Jan 6, 2021, when his supporters stormed the Capitol.

Trump's lawyers had initially set a Friday deadline for the *BBC* to retract its documentary or face a lawsuit for "no less" than $1bn. They also demanded an apology and compensation for "overwhelming reputational and financial harm".

The *BBC*, which has admitted its editing of Trump's remarks was an "error of judgement", sent a personal apology to Trump on Thursday, but said it would not rebroadcast the documentary and rejected the defamation claim.

"We'll sue them for anywhere between $1bn and $5bn, probably sometime next week," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One as he headed to Florida for the weekend. "I think I have to do that, I mean they've even admitted that they cheated," he said. "They changed the words coming out of my mouth."

Trump said he had not spoken with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, with whom he has built a solid relationship, about the issue, but that he planned to call him this weekend. He said Starmer had tried to reach him, and was "very embarrassed" by the incident.

In an interview with British right-leaning TV channel *GB News*, Trump said the edit was "impossible to believe" and compared it to election interference.

"I made a beautiful statement, and they made it into a not beautiful statement," he said. "Fake news was a great term, except it's not strong enough. This is beyond fake, this is corrupt."

Trump said the *BBC*'s apology was not enough.

"When you say it's unintentional, I guess if it's unintentional, you don't apologise," he said.

No rebroadcast

The network's chair, Samir Shah, sent a personal apology on Thursday to the White House and told lawmakers the edit was "an error of judgement". The following day, British culture minister Lisa Nandy said the apology was "right and necessary".

The broadcaster said it had no plans to rebroadcast the documentary and was investigating fresh allegations about editing practices that included the speech on another programme, *Newsnight*.

Biggest crisis in decades

The dispute has escalated into the broadcaster's most serious crisis in decades. Its director general Tim Davie and head of news Deborah Turness quit this week over the controversy amid allegations of bias and editing failures.

Starmer told parliament he supported a "strong and independent *BBC*", but said the broadcaster must "get its house in order". "Some would rather the *BBC* didn't exist. Some of them are sitting up there," he said, pointing to opposition Conservative lawmakers.

"I'm not one of them. In an age of disinformation, the argument for an impartial British news service is stronger than ever."

The *BBC*, founded in 1922 and funded mainly by a compulsory licence fee, faces scrutiny over whether public money could be used to settle Trump's claim.

Former media minister John Whittingdale said there would be "real anger" if licence payers' money covered damages.—Reuters

Iran Guards seize oil tanker

TEHRAN: Iran's Revolutionary Guards said on Saturday that they had seized an oil tanker in the Gulf off the country's coast, a day after security companies determined they were likely responsible.

"Yesterday morning at 7.30, after a judicial authority ordered the seizure of the cargo of an oil tanker with the trade name *Talara* and the flag of Marshall Islands, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) rapid reaction units of the naval forces monitored its movements and intercepted and seized it," said a statement from the IRGC, the ideological arm of Iran's military.

"The tanker was found to be in violation of the law by carrying unauthorised cargo," the statement continued, adding it "was carrying 30,000 tonnes of petrochemical cargo and was heading to Singapore".

The vessel had departed from Ajman, United Arab Emirates, and was heading south through the Strait of Hormuz when it was approached by three small boats, after which it made a "sudden course deviation", maritime security company Ambrey said.

The US Navy had earlier said it was "actively monitoring the situation". "Commercial vessels are entitled to largely unimpeded rights of navigation and commerce on the high seas," said the US Fifth Fleet, which patrols the region.—AFP

Lawmaker blames Trump for death threats against her after their split

WASHINGTON: Republican lawmaker Marjorie Taylor Greene accused US President Donald Trump on Saturday of putting her life in danger, saying his online criticism has triggered a wave of threats against her.

Greene, once a longtime Trump loyalist who has more recently taken positions at odds with the president, said she has been contacted by private security firms warning about her safety.

"Aggressive rhetoric attacking me has historically led to death threats and multiple convictions of men who were radicalised by the same type (of) rhetoric being directed at me right now," Greene, a House of Representatives member from Georgia, wrote in a post on X. "This time by the President of the United States."

MARJORIE Taylor Greene

Trump broke with Greene in a withering social media post in which he referred to her as "Wacky" and a "ranting lunatic" who complained he would not take her calls. He continued his criticism with two more social media posts, calling her a "lightweight Congresswoman", "traitor" and a "disgrace" to the Republican Party.

In her first response posted on Friday, Greene accused Trump of lying about her and trying to intimidate other Republicans before a House of Representatives vote next week on releasing files related to the late financier Jeffrey Epstein, a convicted sex offender who was friendly with Trump in the 1990s and 2000s before they had a falling out.

Epstein factor

On Saturday, Greene wrote that she now has a "small understanding" of the fear and pressure felt by Epstein's victims.

"As a Republican, who overwhelmingly votes for President Trump's bills and agenda, his aggression against me which also fuels the venomous nature of his radical internet trolls (many of whom are paid), this is completely shocking to everyone," she wrote.

Greene was one of only four House Republicans who joined Democrats this week in signing a petition to force a vote on releasing the full Justice Department files related to Epstein.

Trump has called the furore over Epstein, who died in a jail cell in 2019, a hoax pushed by Democrats.

Online backlash from Trump supporters is not unusual. Right-wing influencers and conservative media personalities have become a potent online force in amplifying talking points and false claims, and attempting to discredit Trumps rivals.

Earlier, Trump withdrew his endorsement of Marjorie Taylor Greene, citing her recent criticism of the president's agenda.

"I am withdrawing my support and endorsement of 'Congresswoman' Marjorie Taylor Greene, of the great state of Georgia," Trump posted on *Truth Social*.—Reuters

NEWSMAKERS

JAKARTA: Indonesia's President Prabowo Subianto (left) speaks with his son Didit Hediprasetyo at an air force base after seeing off Jordan's King Abdullah.—AFP

AHMEDABAD: Demonstrators hold placards and candles during a protest against an order by India's Supreme Court to remove stray dogs from public places.—AFP

NEW DELHI: People visit the Dior store, a French luxury brand, in the Indian capital. The globe's biggest luxury brands have dreamt of India's vast consumer base for decades, but navigating the market has proven to be a complex task.—AFP

THE seized macaque monkeys in blue mesh bags after an operation by Thailand's wildlife department in Sa Kaeo province, near the border with Cambodia.—AFP

Attempt to smuggle 81 monkeys in mesh bags foiled

BANGKOK: Thai rangers have arrested two men suspected of being part of an international wildlife smuggling network, the military said on Saturday after they were intercepted in a car carrying 81 macaques near the Cambodian border.

Thailand is a major transit hub for wildlife smugglers, who often sell highly-prized endangered creatures on the lucrative black market in China, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia.

A patrol stopped the vehicle on Friday afternoon in the Aranyaprathet district of Sa Kaeo province, where troops found the monkeys stuffed into a blue net bag.

"At 3:20 pm, authorities arrested the two suspects and inspected their vehicle," the 12th Ranger Forces Regiment, which is responsible for the area, said in a statement on Facebook.

The soldiers also seized methamphetamine pills and crystal meth, though no quantities were specified.

During questioning, the men admitted they were involved in a cross-border trafficking ring moving macaques from Thailand into Cambodia, the military said in a Facebook post.

Troops were working with police to pursue charges under wildlife-protection and narcotics laws.

Last year, Thailand sent almost 1,000 highly endangered lemurs and tortoises back to their home in Madagascar, after both countries' biggest operation against wildlife trafficking.

In May, Thai police arrested a man suspected of smuggling two baby orangutans into the kingdom.—AFP

CHELSEA (US): People line up for food distribution at a pantry in Massachusetts. The pantry assists thousands in need every week.—AFP

DIRIYAH (Saudi Arabia): A Japanese man performs the art of using Japanese sword at Souq Al Mosim, a cultural event to celebrate the 70th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Riyadh and Tokyo.—Reuters